

## FANCY AND FANTASY IN *ROSALIA*: SIGNS OF SELF AND SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>

The characters of Benito Pérez Galdós are notorious for their lack of ontological decorum; they are, by and large, simply not content to prosper in the zone of reality assigned them, but are forever entering lands of dreams, reveries, illusions and outright fantastical events. A rough curve representing the frequency of such incursions into tenuous reality in Galdós' writings would begin with *La sombra*—his first extended fiction work—very high on the left, drop immediately downwards and slope towards his middle years—but by no means disappear—and rise again in his late years, especially from *Misericordia* onwards.

In view of the constant recurrence of these frontier zones in Galdós' work, I think it might be of interest to consider their appearance—from a partial perspective—in an early novel of his, unknown up to now, which I discovered in the Fall of 1979.

At that time, while studying the Galdós manuscripts in the Biblioteca Nacional, in Madrid, I began to notice on the reverse of various texts, characters which, to my knowledge, had not appeared in any of the master's novels written during the period I was studying. After tracking down all I could find, transcribing and ordering the cuarto sheets, an unknown Galdós novel re-emerged, after more than a century of complete dismemberment.

I found 695 sheets, and still lacked 576 to complete the work, according to the numbering Galdós had assigned. Fortunately, during that Fall, Professor Walter Pattison published a tome called *Etapas preliminares de "Gloria,"*<sup>2</sup> which included, in the first section of the volume, the publication of 390 of the pages missing in the text I had found.

A reading of the near-complete work confirms the impression offered by the part published by Pattison: that is, the existence of a distinct and unknown novel by Galdós, although certain theme and plot initiatives—which are quickly abandoned in this work—were later to be utilized by him

<sup>1</sup> This essay was presented at the MLA Convention on December, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Barcelona: Puvill-Editor, no year.

in *Gloria*, his most ambitious thesis novel.

This long-lost novel, which we have called *Rosalía*, in honor of the heroine, was probably written, as professor Pattison observes,<sup>3</sup> around 1872, and is therefore of unusual interest, for it is the earliest contemporary novel of Galdós, at once a winning story and an invaluable document of the novelist's development.<sup>4</sup>

What I propose to do now—after a brief plot summary—is to share with you two instances in *Rosalía* in which a character willfully or unwittingly extends her life into problematical realities. In the first instance, it is the heroine herself who engages our considerations. In the second, we shall meet Charo, whom Galdós would later recreate in Isidora Rufete, and later, transformed, in Fortunata.

The beginning of *Rosalía* takes place in Castro-Urdiales, a small coast town in the province of Santander, but fully three-fourths of the novel occur in Madrid, where the characters soon go, taking the novel with them.

In Castro-Urdiales, Galdós presents us with an innocent and inflexible old *señor* of Carlist tendencies, don Juan Crisóstomo de Gibralfaro and his young daughter, Rosalía, who has recently been betrothed to a returning *indiano*. An English ship sinks off the coast of the town, and don Juan gives room and board to a group of English survivors, among whom we find one Horacio Reynolds, a handsome and eloquent young Protestant minister. Rosalía soon falls in love with him, forgetting her obedient consent to her father's suggestion that she marry the *indiano*. Don Juan receives news from Madrid that his other offspring, Mariano, is leading a dissolute life, and decides to go there and straighten him out. He takes Rosalía in order to marry her, finally, to the native son, who has preceded them to Madrid. They are accompanied by Horacio, whose concerns require a visit to the Spanish capital.

In Madrid, where by far most of the novel transpires, all encounter painful difficulties. Mariano, don Juan's other child, manages to lose his family's fortune in the stock exchange, and it is out of consideration for don Juan's consequent physical prostration that Rosalía and Horacio desist in their desire to wed.

Finally, all the characters are united in a tawdry apartment, where Rosalía has been fooled into going, and where her father, likewise tricked, arrives, leaving his sick bed, to ascertain whether his daughter's honor has been wanting. After discovering Rosalía's innocence, he becomes wildly exuberant and suffers a relapse, from which he does not recover. There is at least one missing page at the end of the extant manuscript, but it seems that

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed introduction to *Rosalía*, see my study, epilogue to the forthcoming edition of *Rosalía* (Cátedra). Though *Rosalía* begins as a thesis novel, it soon abandons its initial definitions.

the much-stymied lovers will not marry.

We are now ready, after this brief synopsis, to consider our first instance of a problematical reality in *Rosalía*. It occurs toward the end of the novel, after the break between Rosalía and Horacio, in deference to don Juan's stubborn refusal and fragile physical and moral condition.

One morning, in don Juan's and Rosalía's usual attendance at mass, something curious happens. "Tenemos que hacer fijar la atención del lector—advises the narrator—en las devociones de aquella mañana porque ocurrió un hecho algo raro, que no debe ser pasado en silencio." (856-870).<sup>5</sup> While in meditation, Rosalía thinks she sees something move "por el fondo de la capilla de enfrente y al otro lado de la gran nave, una sombra, una figura, una persona que no esperaba ver ya en ninguna parte y menos en la iglesia. Cuando fijó intencionadamente la vista, no vio nada." The figure seems to vanish into thin air. Then father and daughter leave, only to return for the evening services.

Once again "Rosalía se dirigió a la que llamaba su capilla, (...) pero (...) mucho antes de llegar a ella vio la misma sombra, figura o persona de la mañana, pero no fugitiva, sino fija, puesta de hinojos en la misma capilla donde ella acostumbraba refugiarse." The frightened girl is unable to go on. She retreats to a chapel on the opposite side of the nave. From that safe distance, "arrodillóse y examinó bien la persona que ocupaba su sitio: parecía más bien una estatua que un hombre, no se movía, no (...) hacía gesto alguno."

At that moment of drugged-like scrutiny, Rosalía suddenly remembers a note that her aunt had slipped into her hand shortly before. As she reads she is surprised to learn that her Horacio is still in Madrid. She looks upward again. "Miró de nuevo a la capilla y la persona o sombra continuaba allí. Rosalía estuvo tentada de acercarse por ver quien era; pero no se atrevió. Tenía tanto miedo a la realidad que confirmara su sorpresa como a la ilusión que la desvaneciera." Darkness falls, and the church is shrouded in shadow. The mass finishes. As Rosalía and her father budge out in the tight crowd, she feels "una especie de roce moral; espiritual, si nos es permitido este absurdo de estilo." As soon as she is outside, she stops by the church door. "Parecía que la tarde no tenía bastante luz ni la calle suficiente extensión para que se espaciaran sus ojos buscando por todas partes alguna cosa. No vio nada. Miró y remiró, pero positivamente no vio nada." Thus ends the ambiguous scene.

Let us now try to understand why Galdós has presented the reader, through his omniscient narrator, such an uncertain figure: statue, *sombra* (shade, ghost) or man. An answer might lie in the ambivalence in the poor

<sup>5</sup> The numbers refer to Galdós' own pagination in the manuscript. I have modernized the spelling in the quotations.

girl herself. As the narrator tells us: "Tenía tanto miedo a la realidad que confirmara su sorpresa como a la ilusión que la desvaneciera." We may therefore consider that the polyvalence which informs material reality (i.e., the changes in a figure in a church), and which is presented by an omniscient narrative voice, is truly a projection of an ambivalence inside the consciousness of a character: Rosalías' desire sees Horacio, but her sense of obligation presents her with a shade, for it was out of filial duty and devotion that she forsook her lover and relegated him to a vague image in her memory, a safe place from which suddenly and threateningly, he now may reemerge.

In a similar fashion, in a much later novel, *Realidad*, written in 1889, Galdós presents us with a scene in which Augusta converses with the spirit of her husband, Orozco. As Gustavo Correa comments: "Augusta, frente a la sombra de Orozco, entra en diálogo implícito con ella misma."<sup>6</sup> The difference between these two examples is that the passage of *Rosalía* we have just seen manages more subtly to present inner conflict through external events that tiptoe on the borderline of the fantastic, but do not fall-in.

Another example of such a structure, whose external actions are very possible and beautiful in nature, occurs in *Fortunata y Jacinta*, when Jacinta, on her way home, hears a baby's cries drifting up from a gutter mouth, and obliges the incredulous concierge of her house to put his arm in the grill in a vain effort to rescue the crying creature, which the good man has assured the distressed lady are only kittens that somebody threw in (Part I, Cap. IV). It was only through Jacinta's unfulfilled maternal longings that their meows changed into human cries.

We see then, that this *motif* reccurs in various Galdós novels, with the external corolary becoming more or less fantastical (the first, blatantly unrealistic example, of course, occurs in *La sombra*, in which the figure of Paris slips off a painting, to torment a fooled husband, as expression of his jealousy). It is indicative of Galdós' early artistic insight that this device should appear so skillfully presented in *Rosalía*.

So far we have seen that Galdós presents the reader with a scene of ambiguous nature in order to depict, it appears, in an external projection, the less handleable, minute, workings of the consciousness of a character. We must now ask ourselves a rather obvious question: was Galdós, then, interested in the working of the human consciousness, and if so, can we find further evidence of this in *Rosalía*.

The frequency of the novelistic mode we have just described clearly indicated that Galdós was indeed concerned in his novels with the "inner" reality, and that he was very much a part of the inward turn of narrative that was renewed in his century with Stendhal and was paradigmatically conse-

<sup>6</sup> *Realidad, ficción y símbolo en las novelas de Pérez Galdós* (Bogotá: Publicaciones del Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1967), p. 159.

crated as one of the objectives, if not *the* objective, of the novel, in Flaubert, with his books about nothing—or nearly nothing—external, but teeming with actions of the soul.<sup>7</sup>

In this context it is extremely interesting to find at the end of *Rosalía*, a passage which puts into relief Galdós' prime objective in writing the cathedral scene we have just witnessed. Rosalía is kneeling by the bedside of her dying father:

Rosalía, en la soledad de la alcoba, junto a su padre a quien consideraba próximo a morir, en presencia de una gran desgracia, se entregó a los más extraños y levantados pensamientos. La soledad, el silencio y la oscuridad son el grande, desahogado y libre espacio donde el espíritu trabaja a sus anchas, ya en el arduo conocimiento de sí mismo, ya en la observación de la vida, estudiando materiales tan aprovechables como son los recuerdos, las experiencias, los restos de nuestras pasiones, las cenizas y sedimentos que las erupciones morales y las tempestades del alma han depositado aquí y allí. (...) es preciso que el espíritu sea de muy grosera organización para no sublimarse al menos momentáneamente, solo por el hecho de conocerse a sí mismo. Al pensar en esto nos figuramos a un hombre a quien se encerrara durante toda la noche en una inmensa y artística catedral gótica, solo iluminada por la claridad de la luna (...) Este hombre, solo, en completo silencio, habría de adquirir una lucidez extraordinaria para conocer el recinto en que se esparcía su vista; le parecería que todo aquello no era más que una prolongación de sí mismo, como cuando cerramos los ojos, y nos quedamos solos dentro de la concavidad de nuestro pensamiento, débilmente alumbrado por vagas penumbras. Rosalía, puesta de rodillas, oyendo la respiración de su padre que iba a morir, cerró los ojos y se encontró dentro de la inmensa catedral de su espíritu (1223-26).

Thus we see that for Galdós, when Rosalía was in the dusking church, she was at once in the "inmensa catedral de su espíritu", and her difficulty in distinguishing the vague figure was clearly an expression of the difficult moral decision she had just made and would be asked to keep. The presence of the motif we have been considering is a recurrent indication that for Galdós, human consciousness was an important element of which great novels were to be made.

We have seen that Rosalía forges her own multiple images of reality as an unconscious attempt to perceive or exorcise the conflict within her own self. Now we shall meet another young woman in *Rosalía*, who harvests her fantasy in the creative efforts of others in an attempt to resolve her externally conflictive situation in the Madrid society of the time. Her name is Rosario, Charo to her friends.

When we first see Charo, the narrator informs us that she has had a checkered past, but that since she has been living with Mariano (don Juan's dissolute son), she has become more level headed, that in spite of her past, she loves completely and truthfully, and that she is making an effort to improve her social status by bettering her pronunciation and vocabulary,

<sup>7</sup> See Stephen Gilman, *Galdós and the Art of the European Novel: 1867-1888* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), especially chapter XI, "The Art of Consciousness", where he expresses, definitively, his thoughts on a matter which he has treated in previous articles and in the classroom.

mostly through reading *folletines*.

Shortly thereafter, we are told that Charo "dio en la flor de atiforrarse de novelas. (...) se suscribió a todas, y las leyó anhelando alimentar su espíritu en aquel parto literario que le parecía inmejorable." (84). Among all her readings, "leyó una que la impresionó extremadamente, con tal violencia que no se contentó con menos que configurarse a la propia heroína de aquella fábula; y esta obra era la *Dama de las camelias*." (518). She desires "ardientemente ser la dama de las camelias: pero sin morirse. Regenerarse con el amor de Mariano, tener una conferencia con el padre de este; separarse de él; volverse tísica y entrar a la muerte, para que luego el idolatrado amante tornara a su lado y ella se pusiera mejor (...)." (519-520). Therefore, as we see, she not only finds a fantasy world, but also, like don Quijote, she will try to live it.

So we see that Charo's desire for upward mobility leads her to the *Corín Tellado* of her times, ostensibly to improve her language, a good enough passport for vertical motion, but what she really is doing is dreaming of a world in which her love for Mariano might be considered as having human worth, not merely as a damnable, if understandable, young man's mischief with a prostitute.

The social "ceiling" against which poor Charo's ambitions and dreams collide is made evident in a scene between her and Rosalía. Rosalía has gone to her aunt's house, where she is told Horacio would meet her. He doesn't show, and the distraught *señorita* finds instead some people whose company she does not care for, among them Charo, who, knowing she has her lover's sister before her, begins a pathetic dialogue with the still-unsuspecting Rosalía: Charo hopes to win the young lady's affection, and, failing that, her compassion, or even her pity.

Charo broaches the subject with Rosalía, who has no idea what the young Traviata is talking about:

...desde hoy vamos a ser amigas. Yo sé que Ud. tiene también una pasión casta y pura. ¡Amar! Quién puede vivir sin amar. Yo no soy de esas que todos los días tienen una pasión distinta, y soy tan constante que sólo un hombre me ha agradado. Le diré a Ud. ... A cuantos me han dicho que si quería *hablar* (*sic*) con ellos, les he contestado que no, y todos me cargan menos aquel. Cuando llegue el feliz instante de nuestra unión, seré la mujer más dichosa del mundo. (960).

Charo has begun by alluding to Rosalía's love for Horacio, thus—for the moment at least—putting Rosalía and herself on the same level ("Yo sé que Ud. tiene *también* (my emphasis) una pasión casta y pura"). She ends by referring to her own marital aspirations with the language of a *niña de bien*, who might anticipate a most correct and catered bourgeois wedding: "Cuando llegue el feliz instante de nuestra unión, seré la mujer más dichosa del mundo"—precisely the normalcy and social integration she longs for.

Finally, Charo mentions Mariano by name. Rosalía's reaction is instantaneous:

Rosalía comprendió al instante que era aquella la mujer de quien había oído hablar como principal causa de la perdición de su hermano. Avergonzada de hallarse en tal compañía, se levantó para salir de allí; pero Rosario, dando unos chillidos que partían el corazón, la detuvo exclamando:

—Ay! no me abandone Ud. ... Yo soy el más desgraciado de los seres. Ud. también es de los que quieren poner en mi frente el sello de... Qué desventura! Verse rechazada de todo el mundo... Y por qué Virgen de las Angustias. Por qué, teniendo el corazón puro. (962-963).

Charo is at a loss to understand why that societal order which, in a way, was partially founded on her way of life, and certainly to a degree responsible for it, should rebuff her worth as a human being, capable of love.

For our present purposes it suffices to see that Charo does, indeed, press against a barrier which she did not put there, a glass pane which only deforms her features as she more tightly hugs it, in an effort to look beyond it. Only in her readings of popular novels does she satisfy her longing, does she go through the glass and dwell in giddy heights which far outstrip the felicity of bourgeois acceptance so adamantly denied her.

Let us now review what we have seen in Rosalía's fancy and Charo's fantasy. We began by stopping to examine, in *Rosalía*, Galdós' early, lost, novel, the presence of questionable reality in two instances. And this initial inquiry has brought us to another vantage point: a consideration of Galdós' reason for fiction. In the first case, we saw that Rosalía's fancies in a dark church were really signs of her conflictive consciousness, and that consciousness was for Galdós a fascinating and obliged reason for his novelist's art. Charo's Quixotic fantasies, on the other hand, have lead us to a perspective on the other focus of Galdós' work, the social conscience which Rosario was trying to obviate in book-dreams.

Thus we have observed in *Rosalía* that Galdós held reality to be accountable to the human experience, and therefore not an article of dogma, and his art, an effort to perceive the self's exchanges with itself, as well as those of the individual consciousness with the larger, historical, consciousness of human society.

Fantasy was for Galdós the novelist not an abandonment of an odious reality he might tire of depicting—just the opposite, it was a symptom of the real, and thus a function of reality. The ghosts, day-dreams and illusions with which Galdós' work is marked are like distant flags seen to rise and nod above the horizon, which when we draw near are by and large proved to be carried by the quotidian march of life, either of a man, or a woman, or of a people.

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